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GIs May Remain in Honduras After Maneuvers

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WASHINGTON—Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger is expected to order about 1,000 U.S. military support personnel to stay in Honduras after current maneuvers there end if he decides that there should be new maneuvers later this year, Pentagon officials said Friday. The decision on new exercises by U.S. and Honduran forces is now before Weinberger, these officials said, but there is no indication of when he will act.

There are about 3,000 American military personnel in Honduras as part of the Big Pine II war games,

which began last August. The exercise, second of a series under the Reagan Administration, at their peak involved 5,000 Americans from three services. It is scheduled to end next month.

There have been recent hints that another round of maneuvers will begin in June but will involve fewer troops.

"If follow-on exercises are decided upon," a defense official said, "the secretary will probably direct that support people like radar operators and those who maintain airfields—but no maneuver (combat)

battalions—remain there until the next exercises. It makes sense not to go to the expense of moving them out and then back again."

Other troops likely to remain would include air traffic controllers, medical specialists and engineers.

Besides saving money, keeping these forces in place would be aimed at discouraging Nicaraguan forces from striking across the border at rebels based in Honduras, who are financed by the CIA, another American official noted.

The U.S. presence, he said, would also maintain psychological pressure on the leftist Sandinista government in Managua to reduce aid to Salvadoran rebels and to institute democratic reforms at home, which are among the avowed purposes of the CIA help for the Nicaraguan rebels known as contras.